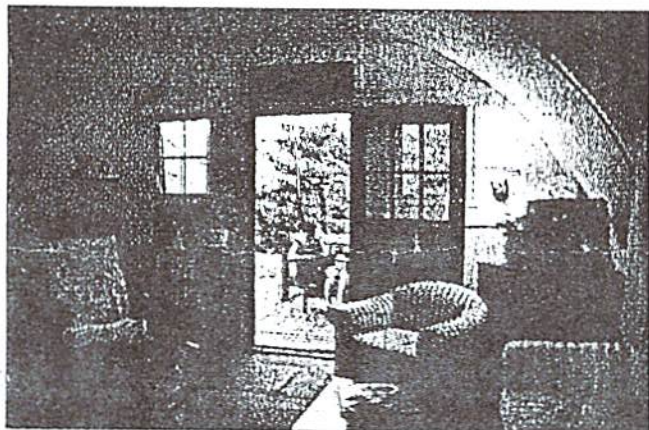


GREG DERR photos/The Patriot Ledger

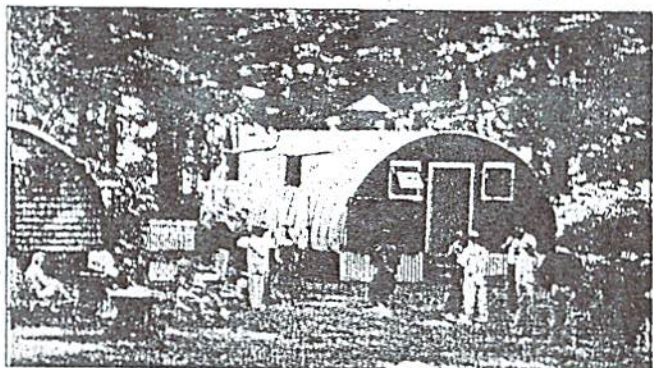
Joan Stiles will soon tear down the Quonset hut where she spent 60 summers. Her father and his brother bought two of the huts in 1947, and the families have three generations' worth of memories. But the summer retreats have fallen into disrepair.

HUMBLE HUTS

Throwback homes in Duxbury are living on borrowed time



■ Stiles reads a book on the front stoop of the Quonset hut.



■ An undated family photo of a backyard barbecue at the huts.

Photo courtesy of Stiles family

By JANE MACKAY
The Patriot Ledger

To Joan Stiles, summer means a Quonset hut in Duxbury.

Nestled among trees near the end of a short, quiet street are two of the iconic half-moon-shaped, corrugated steel huts.

Stiles' father and uncle bought them as Army surplus shortly after World War II. They paid \$200 per hut, which included shipping from Quonset Point, R.I., to Duxbury.

On land that Stiles' father had inherited, the two families erected the shelters side by side, intending them to be temporary summer homes where Stiles' parents and their two infant children could escape the projects of Somerville.

Sixty years later, the huts that were temporary overflow with three generations' worth of memories.

Every summer the two families left the city for the freedom and warmth of their rural, beachside homes. By the early 1950s the two huts between them spilled over with almost a dozen kids.

"We all had corresponding cousins of

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■ Stiles offers a photo of the huts in better days.



HALF-MOON HUTS RECALL FAMILY SUMMERS

■ QUONSET

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just about the same age and sex," Stiles said. "Plus, the street in those days had several multi-generational families and we were all friends. We were all very connected in that little place."

Situated on a three-quarter acre plot in a neighborhood of plots a third that size, the huts became a natural gathering place for the denizens of a street that in summer was home to 47 kids.

"The whole neighborhood gravitated here," Stiles said. "There was a half-acre out back called 'the dirt bowl' that was a ball field, and my dad used to cut everybody's hair and pull their teeth."

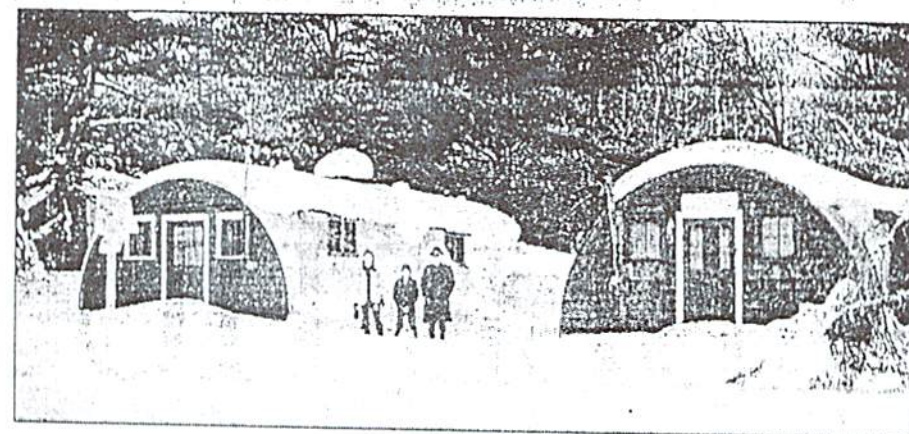
By profession a linen salesman, Stiles' father had no training in barbering or dentistry, he "was just really good at it," Stiles says with a laugh.

Before long, far-flung relatives were making their own way to the little South Shore town, like the Milwaukee aunt who'd arrive with her four children — bringing Stiles' family hut's total occupancy to 14. Extended family would also send kids with whom they were having problems.

"As teenagers we'd always have cousins staying for a month or a week or whatever," Stiles said.

To cope with the overflow, Stiles' father and uncle built bunkhouses, one that slept six and the other, four. The larger one soon became a haven for the girls — the boys were relegated to the other.

But for most of the long summer days the tumbled mix of cousins, neighbors and friends reveled in their freedom from the



A photo of Stiles and her father during a winter escape to the Quonset huts.

constraints and heat of the concrete-covered city.

"We roamed around in the woods and went to the beach then came back and hosed off outside," Stiles said.

In that, her days might have been echoes of her father's summer days, decades earlier.

"My father grew up here, summers," she said. "And his father and his grandfather all built their own summer homes here."

It was little wonder, then, that the two little Quonset huts in Duxbury became the hub for extended family gatherings.

In the beginning, though, the days were quiet. Stiles' father and uncle used to stay in the city, coming down only on weekends. Left to fend for themselves and their infant and toddler children, Stiles' aunt and mother would pile the kids into baby carriages and push them three miles each way to the grocery store to get supplies for that day's meals.

Stiles' mother died in 2006 at the age of 92, after being widowed for many years. Stiles' father died at

age 86 after a long battle with Parkinson's disease.

"I'm just grateful that the huts held up through my parents' lives," Stiles said. "My parents had 14 grandchildren and they all have a very strong attachment, too."

Stiles has never stopped making the summer pilgrimage — now just a short, cross-town hop from her winter rental — to the 17-foot-by-36-foot hut five minutes from the beach, although age has lessened the length of time she lives there each year.

"I used to move in on April 1 and not leave until sometimes Nov. 15," she said. "I had a little a gas heater and the hut stays warm surprisingly long. They were surprisingly well made."

Created out of necessity when the United States entered the war, Quonset huts are built from a design that took the British Nissen hut as its starting point. Steel ribs support corrugated steel sheets outside and bent plywood inside, with a layer of insulation in between. A tongue-and-groove wood floor completes the homey feel.

"There's just a warmth to it," Stiles said. "I think it has something to do with the roundness. Everyone who comes in sort of laughs, but it's a laugh of delight."

Stiles' parents installed partitions to create rooms, but at only 8 feet high, the walls had a half-moon of space above them that helped cause one almost comical antipathy.

"I used to hate Curt Gowdy," Stiles said. "When the Red Sox were playing my mom would send us kids to bed then turn the radio up really loud and listen to the game."

Stiles' son-in-law, though, is impressed by the efficiency with which space was used. The member of the Navy told Stiles, "This is like a ship. There's not an inch of wasted space."

Stiles can attest to that efficiency.

"When I was young the foot of my bed was in the closet," she said. "I had shirts hanging over my feet."

Along with interior partitions, Stiles' father installed side windows and did all of the electrical and

plumbing work, and it's these elements that for many years have been slowly failing.

Several years ago one of Stiles' cousins suggested tearing down the Quonsets and building a communal vacation house.

Stiles was not taken with the suggestion. She told her cousin, "I will lie down on the ground in front of the bulldozer."

In the 15 years since then, Stiles has accustomed herself to the thought of saying goodbye.

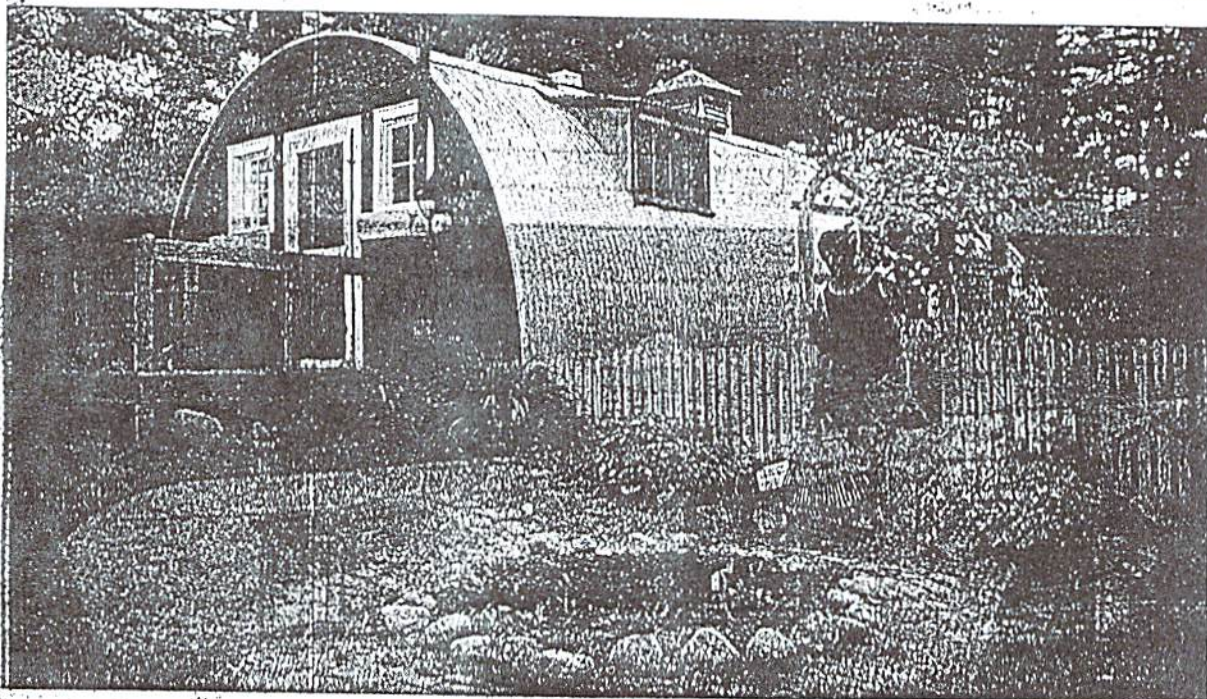
"It will need to come down in the next couple of years," she said. "I considered trying to rehab it but my brothers told me I was nuts."

"But that would still be my first choice,"

Stiles plans to build something in the huts' place, but there's one Quonset hut pleasure her future summer home will likely never provide.

"This is a wonderful place to sit out a rainstorm," she said. "The tin roof gives you a sense of the music of the storm."

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Stiles loves the Quonset hut in which she has summered for six decades but knows it has to come down in a few years. GREG DERR/The Patriot Ledger